

# SCRIPTURE EXPOSITION IN SCOTLAND IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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IN 1759 there was published at Glasgow *An Exposition of the Book of Job*, by James Durham, and in a prefatory note this paragraph occurs : “ As there were few expositions or commentaries upon the holy Scriptures in this nation, about an hundred and twenty years ago, so the most learned and eminent ministers agreed, about the year 1650, to print some plain and short expositions of the principal books in the Old and New Testament ; Mr George Hutcheson accordingly, published his expositions upon Job, the lesser prophets, and the Gospel of John ; Mr Alexander Nisbet printed his exposition of Ecclesiastes, and the Epistles of Peter ; Mr David Dickson, his expositions upon the Psalms, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, and his Latin Commentaries on all the Epistles, were also printed ; Mr James Ferguson, his exposition upon the Galatians, and the five following epistles were also published ; and Mr Durham’s expositions of the Song of Solomon was printed sometime after his death.”

In historical writings of the period no notice has been found of this project—even Baillie, interested in it and acquainted with the most eminent of those mentioned, appears to have no reference to it—but history is apt to be drawn to the noisy and not the quiet things of life, and Scottish Church History especially is more familiar with Covenants, Resolutions, and Protests than with scholarship and exposition. The project, however, seems worthy of an honourable niche in the fabric of the Scottish Church.

## I

The originator and constant apostle of the idea was David Dickson—the familiar David Dick of Baillie’s Letters—Minister at Irvine from 1618, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow from 1640, and at Edinburgh from 1650, twice Moderator of the General Assembly, 1640 and 1652,

and who died at the close of 1662, nearly eighty years of age, "a well-favoured, proper old man, with a long beard."

He had peculiar skill in showing his hearers all their heart, and his ministry at Irvine was a very popular one with his parishioners, if not with the Court of High Commission, so that numbers of his sermons were taken down by one of them more or less accurately, copies of these, with additional faults of transcription, being freely circulated. For himself, he had no desire to publish anything, as he regarded his gifts as more fitted for his "present Charge, than for more publicke Edification," but this made him willing, if time were permitted him, to condense the substance of twenty or thirty of these sermons "in the boundes and pryse of one at large." Something of his, too, had been printed previously without his knowledge or allowance, and this made him more desirous that anything he had spoken, which was considered worthy of more publicity, should be in circulation correctly.

Such inducements to issue something from the Press concurred with that idea he had had in mind for some time which concerns us here. There were in existence "large Commentaries, and sweete Sermons," especially by Divines of the Church in England, but owing to size and price their circulation was restricted. Dickson longed for something shorter and plainer (and naturally cheaper) which might be read even by busy people or those who had no great scholarship. To further this purpose he says: "I have beene verie instant, with the Godlie-Learned of myne acquayntance, to take this matter in hand; and, to divyde, amongst them, the hard parts of Scripture, at least; that this worke might bee done by the handes of manie, which could not bee done by one. I found their approbation of my desire, and inclinable willingness, to put hand to worke also. But, some of them, for the weyght of their ordinarie Charge, some of them for age, and infirmitie of bodie, some of them for their handes full of the Lord's worke in another sorte, could not adventure to bee straytlie ingaged in the worke. Where thorough I was forced, eyther to forsake my Desires, which daylie were kindeled within mee more and more; or else, come foorth with something, of this kynde, as might bee; and seeke amongst my Readers, some to take this Matter to heart; and, to doe therein, as the Lord should enable them, by themselves, or by others." He tells us this in his preface to *A Short Explanation, Of the Epistle of Paul To The Hebrewes*, printed by Raban at Aberdeen in 1635: a small octavo of 348 pages. Any success attending his effort with this "piece of hard Meate" would encourage others, he hoped, to attempt less difficult Scripture. To this intention of encouraging others to write Dickson returns again and again in print, and in private conversations also the idea was canvassed and advocated by him.

His method was to give a summary of the contents of each chapter, followed by an exposition of the text, verse by verse. The points made in this exposition are followed by doctrines, introduced by the particle "Then," or "Wee Learne," all carefully and clearly numbered. The doctrines he does not enlarge upon, "leaving them as graynes of Seede, to get their growth in thy mynde, by Meditation." The "moulde" he has thus set he hopes will be followed up and improved upon, for his special desire is "that more able Men may bee set on worke." He has asked no Patronage—the volume has no laudatory Dedication—his whole intent is the Truth of Scripture without partiality, "not wresting the Text, to reach a Blowe to anie man."

One illustration only of his "moulde" and matter is given, but it may be taken as typical. It is from Chap. III, verse 7.—"Vers. 7. Wherefore, as the holie Ghost sayeth, To-day, if yee will heare His Voyce.

"1. In the worde of the Psal. xcv, vers. 9 he exhorteth them, to beware of hardening their heart in unbeliefe. The wordes of the Psalmes are called here, The Saying of the holie Ghost ; and, of the God of Israell, 2 Sam. xxiii, 2, 3.

"Then, 1. The authoritie of the Scripture, is not of man, but of the holie Ghost. 2. The Scriptures are no dumbe letter, but the voyce of the holie Ghost, who by them speaketh. 3. The holie Ghost, is God, the Inspirer of the Prophets, that wrote the Scripture. 4. The holie Ghost, is a distinct person of the Godhead, from the Father, and the Sonne ; exercising the proper actions of a person ; inspiring the Prophets, dyting the Scriptures, and speaking to the Church."

Vigorous and pithy phrases are not uncommon, and the occasional old Scots word adds a flavour of its own, *e.g.*, "derne," "syle," "brangle," "misken," "fire-flaughts." Dickson—or his printer—believed in frequent changes of type, as there are four different sizes used in the short passage quoted, yet the printing is most accurate throughout. It is noteworthy that he uses the King James' Version, not the Genevan. It was issued again at Dublin in 1637.

Ten years later, in 1645, Dickson published his *Expositio analytica omnium Apostolicarum Epistolarum*, *i.e.*, Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude ; but this was in Latin, and he does not reckon it part of the popular scheme he had in view. It was published at Glasgow in 1645 and again in 1647 in quarto, and an English translation appeared in folio at London in 1659.

## II

In spite of Dickson's advocacy, no other Divine came forward to assist him, although there was discussion and sympathy as to his project,



so for example and encouragement he issued in 1647 *A brief Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*.<sup>1</sup> This is a small quarto of 252 pages, printed at Glasgow.<sup>1</sup> The Dedication is to the Earle of Loudoun and his son, Lord Mauchlin, and refers in enthusiastic terms to the former's hazardous services in defence of Religious Truth and Freedom. Here the author speaks with delight of the "multitude of impressions" of the Bible now in circulation, and of the "many thousands," both Scots and English, who not only have copies at home but "carie it in their pockets, for reading of it upon all occasions." This is a call to ministers and scholars to make sure that there is no misunderstanding or abuse of the Word. Large commentaries serve only those with leisure and patience; paraphrases and "sweet notes" are useful so far as they go; yet "these dangerous Times with so many errors appearing do call for such an explanation of the whole Bible, as might not only shew the scope of each Book and Chapter, with the cohesion of the Verses, and the meaning of the Words; but also propone the special heads of Doctrine in each place, . . . and all this to bee in such brevity and clearnes, that Men in their Dayly Set-reading of the Lords Word, might in the space of half an hour peruse a competent portion of Scripture, thus explained." This explains the publication of the Exposition, "to call yet again unto the Godly Learned, to stir up themselves for contributing one with another, unto some such brife explanation of the whole Bible, as their Godly Wisedome shall agree upon a mould, this or any other: because appearantly, it is but little and not considerable, which any one man alone can overtake in this Work." This he expands in a preface "To the Honest Hearted Reader," where he also tells us that he has written this to prove to others—worthy Men of God—that the mould of his first book can fit any other part of Scripture. He has kept before him clearness and brevity, since "this sort of Writing must be for those only, who (for one reason or other) must either have something in short, or nothing at all." It is "more Stuffle of this kinde" that people need, and which he prays men may be stirred up to produce.

This is his opening sentence from his notes on the Lord's Prayer: "For helping of this, and other faults about Prayer, our Lord giveth us the example of a formed Prayer, which is ready and fit to be made use of expresly as a *Prayer*, whensoever we would join in one body, with all true Christians militant in the World, in all common and necessar desires; which also is to be made use of, as a *Patern* and *Platform* for imitation,

<sup>1</sup> No copy is noted as existing in any of the great libraries, and the edition is not even mentioned in the revised *Fasti* under the author's name. My copy lacks the title-page, and the place and date of printing are taken from Aldis' *List of Books printed in Scotland before 1700*. It was issued again at London in duodecimo form in 1651.

when we are to pray for any one, or mo things, more particularly concerning our self, or any part of the militant Church."

## III

Dickson's persistent advocacy of his plan in public and in private was gradually affecting some of the younger men so that their pens were beginning to move before 1650, yet the third contribution to the purpose in hand is also his own. This was three volumes on the Psalms, printed at London in 1653, 1654. His volume on Hebrews he had called an *Explanation*, that on Matthew an *Exposition*, this he describes on the title-page as an *Explication*, although he returns to the second word in the volume itself: *A Brief Explication of the first Fifty Psalms; A Brief Explication of the other fifty Psalmes; and A Brief Explication Upon the last Fifty Psalms*.<sup>1</sup> Like the last, these volumes were dedicated to eminent Scots folk of title: the first to "my Lady Marquesse of Argyle, and my Lady Anne Campbell, her eldest daughter," the second to "The Earle of Eglington," and the third to "The Earl of Cassills." The Edinburgh Professor had not forgotten his noble friends of the West Country, least of all the first-named Earl's kindness to, and interest in, him, during his confinement in "a little vilage in the North beyond Aberdein." He had been confined at Turriff by the Court of High Commission in 1622, 1623.

Still he seeks to interest and convince his brethren, and he issued the first fifty Psalms "by way of Essay" to discover what they thought of his method and matter that he might improve upon them if possible, and it is still in his purpose "to stirre up some more able instruments to lay open briefly, in this mould, or any other they please better, the chiefe Doctrines treasured up in the store-house of holy Scripture."

For the first time he is able to forecast the work of others: "I am not altogether out of hope, that the Lord shall hearken to my desire, and set some of his servants on worke, ere it bee long, to entertaine this motion, and to take a share also in the taske"; yet the second fifty Psalms were issued without his being able to point to anything.

The reception of the first volume was so encouraging that he purposes completing the whole as quickly as his many duties permit, and he explains again in the second that if "the sense and the use" are

<sup>1</sup> The first two were printed in 1653, the third probably in 1654, but I have been unable to find a copy. "The second Edition corrected" was also in three volumes, printed in 1655. It is a new setting, yet follows the first Edition in contents page for page. They are neat little octavos of 350 to 400 pages. The whole was printed again at Glasgow in 1834 in two volumes, 6mo, with the author's life by Wodrow, the historian.

given, expanded exposition is not necessary. His mould has the advantage of letting the reader pause at any passage that makes special appeal, "and feed upon what thou hast found till it be digested, and then return when thou wilt, and seek for as much as may be another morsell. For the reading of many diverse doctrines without some interlaced meditation, is like eating of marrow without bread, and cannot but cloy thee for the time, or give thee a surfeit of wholesome food." This evil may be helped by "short ejaculations of a word of prayer" during reading. He apologises for errors in the printing of this and the previous volume by his being at such a distance from London, "as I can neither timously prevent them, nor marke them as *Errata* that thou mightest correct them."

In the volume completing the work he tells us further that one of the special motives for doing it in sections was that it might not have been done at all, had he waited until his notes on the whole one hundred and fifty Psalms were finished. The times were troubled and he is becoming an old man (he was born in 1583), and so he had wished to avoid any possible miscarriage. Such a division also gave him the opportunity of expressing his obligations to more noble friends who had "put their shoulder to the work of settling Religion and the Kingdom of Christ among us," than a single larger work would have done. The somewhat dark picture of the times drawn by him in the Dedication scarcely concerns us here, but Brownism evidently had become a plague in the north, and the "Sect-masters" were maintaining and patronizing "ungodly pranks" and "damnable practices," defended "by the Doctrine of divels." Some such trouble in public worship seems to lie behind this passage to his readers: "as in the changes of our own particular condition, we have libertie to chuse for our use such parts of the Psalms as do speak most near to our present case: so let us be bound in publick meetings of the Church to joyn with the Congregation in singing every truth uttered by Gods Spirit in the Psalms, as we are directed by the Minister and mouth of the meeting."

The Scots flavour in Dickson's language is less marked in these volumes than in his *Hebrews* of twenty years before.

#### IV

In none of Dickson's three volumes on the Psalms is there direct reference to the publication of any kindred work, but on the Advertisement page of the second edition (1655) there is mention of "Mr *Hutcheson* upon the twelve Minor Prophets." It is to this that the hope expressed in his first volume refers.

George Hutcheson had come from Colmonell, Ayrshire, where he



had been interested in Dickson's proposals, to be minister at the Tolbooth in Edinburgh, in 1649; and during the latter's Professorship there, seems to have entered into the older man's ideas so thoroughly and sympathetically that his share in the work is nearly as large as the other's. In his own words: "Being some years ago seriously invited with divers others, by the Reverend Author of that Exposition on *Matthew*, to concur with him in prosecuting that purpose which he had begun, and hath since made further progress into, upon the booke of Psalms; I did then essay some of these Prophets, being at that time recommended unto me, and of late at his desire (living now through Gods providence in one City) I have looked upon them over again, and adventured to present these to publick view, if so be it may invite others who have more ability and leisure, to mind and help forward such a work upon the whole Bible." And again:

"One of you" [he means Dickson] "was the first mover and solicitour of me to any undertaking of this kinde, when I little dream'd of such a matter, and hath continued a constant encourager of me in going about it." One can feel Dickson's influence in the very words which conclude the former of these quotations.

Hutcheson is said to have been "a great preacher," and "in his time one of the greatest expositors of Scripture Scotland had ever produced," and the reader is certainly impressed with the free, modern note in what he writes. *E.g.*, he does not support his doctrines by citation of texts, "it being my desire that no more be admitted, or received here, than such as clearly flow from the text in hand." Other texts he uses for illustration, not proof; he seeks "to keepe by the rule of faith, and set downe that Exposition which is most agreeable to the context it selfe." No policy could be sounder or safer for those Scriptures he worked at.

He began with the six middle prophets—Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah—but any hope he had that the rest would be overtaken by others being disappointed, he went on and did the last three—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and then finished the work by completing Hosea, Joel and Amos—*A Brief Exposition Of The Prophecies Of Obadiah, etc.* *A Brief Exposition Of The Prophecies Of Haggai, etc.*, and *A Brief Exposition On The XII Smal Prophets; The First Volume Containing An Exposition On The Prophecies of Hosea, Joel, & Amos*. The first of these parts was licensed, January 27, 1653, and was probably printed in the same year, but I have failed to see a copy. A second and amended edition was certainly published at London in 1654. The second part was licensed, April 29, 1654, and was issued at London in the same year; and the third part (license undated) also at London in 1655. When this last was printed its title-page was made common to the whole

work, as is seen above, and the three parts are generally found in two volumes, the first containing Hosea, Joel, and Amos, and the second the remaining nine, making a couple of neat little octavos of 530 and 630 pages. The whole was issued again in a handsome folio of 426 pages, at London, 1657, while he was still minister at the Tolbooth, and he presented an inscribed copy to the University Library, bound with his *Exposition of St John*, published in the same form that year.

Hutcheson had been greatly encouraged in his work by his brethren in the Edinburgh Ministry, who gave him not only their "brotherly and free animadversions" but allowed him "to retire" himself to perfect what had been given first to his congregation. In appreciation of their kindness he dedicated the third and completing part of his work to them and "the Professour of Divinity in the University there." The first part was dedicated to "Anne, Dutchesse of Hamilton," and the second to "John, Earle of Cassillis." The reference of Edmund Calamy, the licenser, to the widespread and enthusiastic reception of his first essay in exposition, is supported by the fact of its speedy re-issue in 1654. The warm letter of recommendation by Dickson to this firstfruits of his persistent advocacy was thoroughly justified.

Books on Joel and Hosea had already been in circulation, but the desire for the uniform mould which Dickson had kept before him was Hutcheson's argument for going over the ground again, and he invites his readers' prayers that some will take up "particularly the greater Prophets" and "the writings of the New Testament."

One feature of the *Exposition* is worth adding. In the course of his notes Hutcheson has occasion to refer frequently to the conversion of the Jews and their "restitution to their own land," which were popular themes with many people, and the Millenial Reign of Christ on earth. He speaks very cautiously, however, "as I take no pleasure in singular opinions, nor to be peremptory in those things, which time will be the best commentary unto."

"If their conversion will be National, it is agreeable to right reason that they wil get a Land for habitation, as a Nation, and what Land more expedient then their own?" The proper application of such passages of prophecy is "that so the godly may be stirred up to pray more earnestly for the conversion of Israel, at which time the Lord, by performance, will give his own commentary to these and many other promises."

## V

Dickson appears to have kept up a very active connection with the neighbourhood of his first charge at Irvine, and the next of his recruits to appear in print was James Fergusson, ordained in 1643 at Kilwinning,



at the age of twenty-two. Writing in 1658 he says: "I was one of those, who, some ten years ago, without my knowledge, were pitched upon by some Reverend Brethren in the Ministry for carrying-on this Work: at which time, I almost perfected the whole task allotted for me; but, through some sad accident in those times of trouble, all the Papers I had written upon that subject, were destroyed and lost, and so a great part of my time and life in a manner lost with them: which, notwithstanding, did not so discourage me, but the remembrance of what sweetnesse I tasted in that study, and of the manifold advantage wherewith it did recompense my pains, did make me full seven years after more easie to be wrought upon and perswaded by the earnest desires of others to make a new essay, as being confident from former experience, I my self at least should be no loser by it."

His own desire was to remain a preacher and pastor, but he says he was "in a manner commended by some Reverend Brethren, whom I honour and reverence in the Lord," to show what he could make with the stuff of his preaching, which "they were pleased to publish and to call for more."

Dickson and Hutcheson prefaced his first attempt with a most encouraging letter from Edinburgh, and show us that this modesty of Fergusson was very genuine, for "he did, after much entreaty, scarcely permit these first fruits to appear in public." He knew that the completion of the work so well begun by these was greatly desired by many people, and he had a hope that if his work with all its weakness should be acceptable to the public then many of greater ability, "who did lie-by" might be induced to assist! In their introductory letter the Edinburgh Divines, in expressing a similar hope, make the modification, that, if not the whole of Scripture, at least the more difficult and most profound might be overtaken. This is a return to Dickson's first proposals in his work on Hebrews.

Fergusson first issued *A Brief Exposition Of The Epistles of Paul To The Philippians and Colossians*; an octavo, printed both at Edinburgh and London in 1656, followed in 1659 by *A Brief Exposition Of The Epistles of Paul To The Galatians And Ephesians*; another octavo of over 800 pages, from Edinburgh and London, dedicated to three of his flock—Alexander, Earl of Eglintoun; Hugh, Lord Montgomery, his son; and the Lady Mary Lesley, Lady Montgomery.

His notes for *A Brief Exposition Of The First and Second Epistles Of Paul To The Thessalonians* were ready to be transcribed for the Press some time before his death in 1667, but did not appear until Hutcheson issued them with a short note of explanation and eulogy. It is one of the smallest of the series, if one may use that word, having only a little over 300 small octavo pages, like Dickson's *Hebrews*. It was issued at [London

in 1674 ? and] Glasgow in 1675. I have not seen a copy of Fergusson's first publication, although there is one in the British Museum. It is a compliment to this young minister's worth that his expositions of all six Epistles were issued in Ward's Library of Standard Divinity about 1850 (?).

"He was a man of a deep reach," says his editor, but one extract must suffice: "The more a Minister be perswaded, and above all doubt, of the truth of what he Preaches, the more he believes and doth therefore speak, and the more he speaks as one who believes, and hath ventured his soul upon the truth which he Preaches, his Preaching will prove the more powerful, and apt to work effectually upon the hearts of hearers: and the more he doubts, the less he believes and is perswaded of these truths which he Preacheth, his Preaching will prove the more warsh, lifeless, and coldryf" (1 Thess. i, 5). He is especially searching on ministerial faults, virtues, and methods of success, for a minister's "naughty life may destroy more than his Preaching can save."

## VI

Before Fergusson's second book on the Pauline Epistles was issued, other volumes—some by new men—appeared, for the decade 1650-60 was the most prolific of the results from Dickson's persistence. It was a time of comparative peace in Scotland.

In 1657 Hutcheson followed up his work on the Minor Prophets with *An Exposition Of the Gospel of Jesus Christ According to John*. This was a London-printed folio of 420 pages, and a copy forms part of the volume he gifted to Edinburgh University Library that year. As usual, noble names appear in the Dedication: "The Lady Margaret Lesly, late Countesse of Buccleuch, now Countesse of Weems, Lady Elcho, etc., and the Lady Mary Scot, Countesse of Buccleuch, Lady Scot of Whitcheater, etc., her hopeful Daughter." The father of the former—the late Earl of Rothes—had been "a prime Instrument in the late Reformation," and he is good enough to say to the younger lady, that "by reason of your young and tender years, many of the truths here presented may transcend your capacity for present."

Severe illness had moved him to "emprove my time the best I could," and this work was the expansion of sermons. Although it was larger than anticipated (it is not called a "Brief" Exposition, and it is not a small octavo!), yet the subject was so rich that he had "only gathered some gleanings." The mould is the same as before, since the readers in view are not chiefly "the judicious and learned." In style and sentiment Hutcheson again strikes the more modern note.

In 1662 he was deprived by Parliament of his charge in Edinburgh—

the time of peace was over—and he appears to have spent his retirement, before being indulged at Irvine in 1669, in preparing his addresses on the Book of Job for the Press. They were entitled: *An Exposition Of the Book of Job: Being the Sum of CCCXVI Lectures, Preached in the City of Edinburgh*; and were published at London in folio in 1669. There are three paginations in the volume, as if it had been distributed among three presses: 1 to 398, 361 to 540, and 1 to 55, well over 600 pages in all. Yet he calls it his “Mite,” a word he applies also to his previous folio on S. John’s Gospel.

Many learned works on Job were in existence, but Latin did not suit those he had in view, and even those in English were either too brief to be useful or too large for the purses and leisure of Scots folk. At the same time he allows that his book is bigger than he had desired. He had worked at it from the time he came to Edinburgh in 1649, “for full eleven years.”

Hutcheson’s independent mind was drawn by the fact that much of the Book of Job, being speeches only from Job’s friends, contained contradiction and error, and could not be quoted in support of any doctrines, although still useful as a means of instruction. Those Lectures contain allusions to public events contemporary with their delivery.

## VII

Fergusson’s hope that his appearing in print might induce abler men than himself to follow was realised, and before he published his second volume, “a Reverend Brother, my nearest fellow labourer in the work of the Ministry,” sent his work to the printer. This was Alexander Nisbet, Minister at Irvine, who issued *A Brief Exposition Of The First and Second Epistles General of Peter*.<sup>1</sup> This was printed at Edinburgh early in 1658, a smallish octavo of 360 pages.

Dickson had been Minister at Irvine till 1640; Nisbet, after four years in the Second Charge, was Minister from 1650 till his death at the age of 46 in 1669; and Hutcheson followed him in due time, dying there after a five years’ ministry. Irvine and neighbourhood had a good deal to do with Dickson’s project, and the younger men are now rallying round him nobly.

Nisbet is introduced to the public as Fergusson had been by a prefatory letter of Dickson and Hutcheson, dated from Edinburgh, March 22, 1658, in which they express their pleasure “that the design which hath been long in the hearts of some . . . is like to have some effect,” since these new men have appeared and others “have somewhat

<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that “Brief” is common to most of the titles.



in hand to that purpose." As a matter of fact, only one other name will be added to those already given: the work done by any others was never printed.

With a modesty like Fergusson's, Nisbet had offered his work only "as an help to any who should imploy their Talents in publishing a brief Exposition of these Epistles, after the mould formerly observed on other Scriptures."

Dickson and Hutcheson, however, were confident that it should be published for its own worth and as an encouragement to others. One feels Nisbet rather verbose to-day; he devotes two pages and a half to the first verse of the Epistle. A note on Peter's alleged supremacy will be enough: "There hath never been any supremacy over the rest of the Apostles, conferred upon *Peter*, neither did he ever assume any such thing to himself; and consequently did never cast a copy to any Minister to usurp, or affect any such thing over their fellow-labourers: for, if there had been any such thing, of so great concernment as the Church of *Rome* makes it, it cannot be thought, but this Apostle would have found himself bound to assert it: which if he had done any where, it could not be expected in a fitter place, than in the entry of his Writings, where the Prophets and Apostles usually assert to themselves as much dignity as the Lord allows them; And yet neither here, nor in the following Epistle, is there any such thing, but at the most, *Peter an Apostle* (or, Messenger) *of Jesus Christ*."

Nisbet was an excellent Hebrew scholar, a close student, and modest almost to a fault, bearing with impatience "the least fan or breath of his own Praise." His friends considered him singularly dexterous in expounding Scripture and praised his special faculty of keeping close to his text. Dickson's project had often been discussed by Fergusson and him, and his next task was the Book of Ecclesiastes. Much of this he wrote in a shorthand of his own. The Dedication was written, the Recommendatory Letter to the Reader was written (February 1658), and the book was almost ready for the Press, but a change came over Scotland with the Restoration in 1660, and the writer's assertions "Concerning Obedience to supreme Powers" were considered so hostile to the new order of things that it was kept back and probably destroyed. This seems to have been the offending passage in his notes on Chap. VIII, v, 4: "It is not to be understood as if none might controule Kings, or Supreme Magistrates, Acting contrary to their Duty, and to the command of the Supreme Lawgiver, seing such have been warrantably contradicted, and opposed, and had this same question in substance proposed to them."

Nisbet's only surviving son, however, had learned his father's stenography during his lifetime, and was able to decipher the notes he left,

so that a generation later Patrick Warner, who had been a boy at Irvine during Nisbet's ministry and minister there from 1688, made it his pious duty to see the work through the Press. The Recommendatory Letter mentioned above was written by Ralph Roger, minister at Ardrossan in 1658, and John Spalding, minister at Dreghorn at the same time. Yet the letter alludes to Nisbet as having been some time dead, and his death occurred in 1669. Probably Roger (who is specially mentioned in a printer's note) recast the letter and brought it up to date, letting "February 1658" unfortunately remain! Warner, the editor, did not know of the existence of this Letter, but the printer had secured it somewhere. It alludes to Dickson's project as "that happily begun, but sadly interrupted work and design, of these burning and Shinning Lights of this Church, Mr *Dickson*, Mr *Hutcheson*, Mr *Fergusson*, etc."

The title of this belated work of Nisbet is: *An Exposition With Practical Observations Upon The Book Of Ecclesiastes*. It was printed at Edinburgh, 1694, and is a nicely printed and tidy quarto of 600 pages.

The poetical description of old age in the last chapter is worked out with great detail, and includes: The Eyes; Reason; Arms and Hands; Legs and Thighs; Teeth ("the small noise Old Men, throw want or weakness of their Teeth, make in their eating"); Mouth and Lips; Throat; Unsound Sleep; Grey Hairs; "the weight of a Flie shall be a trouble"; Marrow of the Back-Bone and Arteries of the Heart; Skin containing the Brain ("the Golden Bowl"); Obstruction of a Vein; Livers ("the Cistern," "the Fountain"); Lungs ("the Wheel").

## VIII

The other name to be added to the list of Dickson's assistants or colleagues is that of James Durham, the popular young Glasgow minister. He had been appointed Dickson's successor in the Glasgow Chair, but the Assembly sent him to attend the young king, Charles II, when he made his venture into Scotland, and when that service was finished he had to content himself with a pulpit.

His Glasgow duties were numerous and, among them, he had delivered Lectures on the Book of Revelation, "within a very short time, one of them every Lords-day before Sermon," and many persons had pressed him to publish them, among them his intimate friend, Robert Baillie. They had been "almost all taken from his mouth by the pen of an ordinary hearer." When published, they differed somewhat from those already considered, as they include twenty-five essays or discussions upon such subjects as the Trinity, Ministerial Qualifications, Repentance, Christ's Intercession, the "learned Mede his Synchronisms," the Idolatry

of the Church of Rome, Prophesying, the Waldenses, etc. These themes emerged in the course of the *Exposition*, but had to be handled separately to prevent them drowning the argument. At the same time Baillie, in his introductory Letter to the Reader, expresses his confidence "that the gracious design which some worthy Brethren among us have in hand, and have now far advanced to the good satisfaction of all who have tasted of the first fruits of their Labours, of making the body of holy Scripture plain and usefull to vulgar capacities, is not a little furthered by this Piece: For, albeit with greater length (as the nature of the Book of necessity did require) than these Brethrens design of shortnesse doth admit; yet it maketh very plain and usefull that without all question hardest of all Scriptures." "I hope many more of his Labours shall follow this first, and that the more quickly as this doth receive the due and expected acceptance."

Durham himself "had no time to publish it," says Baillie, but John Carstairs (whose wife was sister to Durham's wife) published it immediately after his death. It is described as *A Commentarie Upon the Book of the Revelation*, and was printed at Edinburgh in 1658. It is a folio of 782 pages (11"×7¼") of text, a weighty production of about four pounds weight. It is indeed a contrast to such a volume even as Dickson's Psalms, the three volumes of which, with well over 1000 pages (6¾"×4¼") weighs only a pound and a half. Yet its popularity must have been enormous, as this list of its issues shows: Edinburgh, 1658 (folio); London, 1658 (folio); Amsterdam, 1660 (folio); Edinburgh, 1680 (quarto); Glasgow, 1680, 1739, 1764, 1788 (all quarto), and Falkirk, 1799 (2 volumes, octavo).

Ten years later Carstairs (?) published Durham's preaching and lecturing notes on The Song of Solomon, but there is no reference in the Epistle to the Reader as to its forming any part of Dickson's plan, beyond the coupling together of his work in "these two Mysterious Books of Scripture, *Canticles* and *Revelation*." Its title is *Clavis Cantici: Or, An Exposition Of The Song of Solomon*. It was printed at Edinburgh in 1668 in a quarto of 482 pages, and had a success even greater than the *Commentary*, though to a modern reader its allegories and applications are somewhat tedious. Ten issues have been recorded: Edinburgh, 1668 (quarto); London, 1669 (quarto); Utrecht, 1681 (an octavo Black Letter translation into Dutch); Glasgow, 1688 (quarto); Edinburgh, 1723 (quarto); Glasgow, 1723 (quarto); Edinburgh, 1724 (quarto); Glasgow, c. 1770 (duodecimo); Glasgow, 1788 (octavo); and Peterhead, 1840 (duodecimo).

The troublous times following the Restoration had sadly interfered with the issue of these popular expositions, and only one other ever saw light—after a whole century. "Mr Durham's exposition of the elegant



book of Job, would have been probably printed by Mr Carstairs if he had lived some longer." The MS. had been carefully treasured, and Wodrow was entrusted with its transcription, which was done by a Glasgow schoolmaster, and in whose hands Scots words were usually replaced by English ones.

*An Exposition Of The Whole Book Of Job, With Practical Observations*, was printed at Glasgow (along with four of his Sermons and a Life) in 1759, in an octavo of 362 pages. It is from the Preface to this volume that the opening extract of the article is taken. The paragraph there quoted goes on: "Mr Robert Blair wrote an exposition upon the Proverbs for the press, but it is not printed; with many other expositions of the inspired writings, which were also prepared, about that time, for publication, and are yet in private hands."

The only other names that have been found associated with the scheme are those of Samuel Rutherford (with whom the Book of Isaiah is connected), Robert Douglas, and John Smith.

Incomplete though the plan of Dickson remained, much had been done. In the forty years which lie between his work on Hebrews and Fergusson's on Thessalonians, twelve of the New Testament Books were printed, and sixteen of the Old Testament before 1700. There was solid and excellent work in it, and when one thinks of the days these men lived through—sometimes hazardous, sometimes bloody red, and always grave and doubtful—one admires them for their loyalty to Scripture and good scholarship, and honours them for the high ideals they had of their ministry.

